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080 **THE STRUCTURE OF THE BARUNDI COMMUNITY (RUANDA-URUNDI TERRITORY, CENTRAL AFRICA).**

By Georges Smets, Professor in the Université Libre de Bruxelles, Head of the Institut de Sociologie Solvay;
(communicated to the Royal Anthropological Institute, 25 September, 1945.

[p. 12 (A)]

122 **6** *Sources*

The subject of this address is Urundi rural life and, broadly speaking, Urundi social structure. Thanks to the Jacques Cassel Foundation, which was established to enable the teaching or scientific staff of the University of Brussels to carry on research in the colonies, I have had the opportunity of staying eight months of the year 1935 in the tropical African

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122 country that I shall attempt to describe to you in a few words.

000 On the other hand, I gratefully acknowledge my debt towards some former students of Barundi customs (viz. J. M. M. van der Burgt, *French and Kirundi Dictionary*, 1903—Hans Meyer, *Die Barundi*, 1916—and the author of an anonymous monograph inserted in the Belgian Government *Report on Ruanda-*

[p. 12 (c)]

800 *Urundi Administration* 1925—and Bishop (!) Gorju in several works dealing with Urundi, where he has been Vicar Apostolic. It lies N.E. of Tang. lake, 2 to 4 degrees S. of the Equator.

Ethnical conditions

563 The Urundi as well as the two neighbouring sultanates of Ruanda and Buha consist of three ethnical groups: (1) the tall, fine-featured, cattle-grazing Batutsi, of Hamitic stock, who constitute a ruling class of some fifty thousand; (2) the middle-sized, rough-featured, land-tilling Bahutu, the largest and main body of a population of over one and a half million; (3) the Pygmy hunting and pot-making Batwa, a mere handful of some thousands of outcasts.

I am reasonably satisfied that these three ethnical groups mix together more than one is generally inclined to believe: they rather seem to become social strata. At any rate there are impoverished Batutsi who till the land, Bahutu who possess cattle, and landless Batwa are not a frequent occurrence to-day. Many impoverished Batutsi have been considered as Bahutu, rich Bahutu as Batutsi. The reasons and theory I brought home were elaborated by Dr. Gerkens and seem to prove that each of the groups is of mingled stock.

Geographical conditions

133 The Urundi is a high country. The region between mountain to the west and the steppe to the east is a plateau, 5,000 feet high, often more, and almost completely without ligneous vegetation, except in the near proximity of habitations. Rivers and brooks have dug themselves deep into this plateau and their valleys have made it a country of more or less important hills, each of them with its own name. The bottom of the valleys is covered with swamps where papyrus grows unchecked (for native agriculture had not been successful there). The stony, grassy hill-tops are merely meadow-land. The cultivated belt [311] normally spreads on the hill-side, with the fenced cabins of the land-tillers in the middle of fields and banana-plantations. Only persons of rank dwell in the higher region.

311 Typical of Urundi scenery as seen from a favourable observation point are the three belts running along one another: below, the ashy green of the papyrus; above, brownish stones and light-coloured grass, sometimes with the rugo of a chief or of his deputy; in between the deep shining green of the banana-trees. [161] Though the population often reaches 350 per square mile, the habitations of most land-tillers remain invisible amidst the banana-trees where they are hidden, and only at the time when meals are prepared does the peacefully ascending smoke betray their presence there.

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No villages

361 Characteristic of the country is the non-existence of villages. Though some habitations may be close to one another, they can never be said to be grouped. [417] Isolated by the compact wooden fence that surrounds them, shut from the outside world by a narrow, easily closing gate, they never look towards any central point that could distinguish some more or less important unit from similar units merely by its being oriented towards that central point. In fact, no such central point ever exists, but cabins appear sprinkled all over the country, in a denser or looser or sometimes discontinued dissemination it is true, but always without any well defined organic nucleus.

No markets

443 Not only in its not having villages is Urundi
439 different from most African countries: neither had it any markets. Before the colonization, markets were only held in the coastal sector of Tanganyika, where their presence can probably be related to the existence of a fishing population. In the interior, the [177] first markets originated with German colonists in the vicinity of administrative posts and missions. Foreign trading, concerned only with skins and salt, was in the vicinity of administrative posts and missions. Foreign trading, concerned only with skins and salt, was on a very small scale.

443 Now Africa is almost entirely a village country and it has also been said it is the favourite land for markets. Admittedly, village and market are far from coinciding in space: but they are not entirely unrelated. Village means daily meeting, market periodical meeting. This regular contact between inhabitants of one more or less important region is certainly less frequent in Urundi than elsewhere.

535 I am inclined to compare with this what can be ascertained concerning dancing. Except in the east (Kumoso), the west (Imbo), and the South (Buha), except with the Batwa, except with women and girls (which I confess is not negligible), dancing has neither the form nor the meaning usual with other popula- [534] tions; as the drum remains a privilege of the *mwami* (sultan), there is no tom-tom; the chiefs themselves pick the carefully trained war-dancers from the whole of their district: such a dance is meant to exalt the chief, not to be a factor of unity for the male population of a district.

Cattle-breeding and agriculture

224 Except for the Batwa, hunting is of little import-
226 ance to the country's life: for the Batutsi, it is a mere sport without practical utility. The economic significance of fishing is not greater.

231 The social significance of cattle-breeding is considerable, yet its economic importance is smaller than

231 [234] one might be inclined to believe. The cows yield little milk, and part of this milk is used for making butter, which is employed not for food, but for a cosmetic. Cattle-slaying is (or rather was) not frequent and only young steers, sterile cows, or old beasts are butchered. The cattle are lean, the pastures usually second-rate. And whatever the cattle-breeders themselves may say, they are mainly vegetarians: but the less immediately productive the cattle-breeders' occupation appears, the greater and the nobler the rank it confers to them. It is mainly [556] an outward sign of wealth, with a superior social standing attached to it that enables the higher classes to procure women and claim the devoted and faithful services of the males. It is worth remarking that the [462] cattle are cared for by the men, not—save in exceptional cases—by the women.

241 Barundi economy is based on agriculture, which is mainly in the hands of the Bahutu, to whom we must add some impoverished Batutsi and most of the Batwa. Sorghum, beans and peas are the chief [273] products, but cassava culture is spreading to-day. Bananas are used for brewing beer. (The agricultural techniques are very primitive, though sometimes more advanced in some respects than might be expected: hardly any other implement than the hoe is commonly employed, and yet manuring and irrigation are known.) Agriculture uses male as well as female [467] labour, but the latter is more common. Among the Batwa only women till the land, and among the Bahutu there are men who take no part in agriculture.

000 This general information will enable us now to understand the chief subject of this address: the intercourse between the elements of the Barundi population where vicinity plays so small a part.

The position towards the political chiefs

643 796 The country's unity is chiefly based on the sultan's personal power; his prestige is clearly visible in the general mourning and the curious burial rites consequent on his death. Also characteristic was the annual recurrence of an important religious festival usually held in our month of December and called *umuganuro*, the sorghum festival, the sorghum desacralization: only after the festival could the people start sowing sorghum in their fields. The *umuganuro*, however, concerned other agricultural [778] products, as well as cattle and game. It included the exhibition of a sacred drum (*karyenda*) and a hierogamy—which the king achieved with the greatest secrecy. It involved, as well for the festivities themselves as for the preparation of the requisites the hereditary collaboration of men and women picked from every social level and every region, however distant. And so the festival created stronger ties

643 796 between the various elements of the people; it was supposed to be a large contribution to the land's fertility and the country's welfare, and in all this the part played by the king was prominent.

643 631 Only in fact was the king's power limited. He transferred the leadership of parts of his sultanates to some chiefs, almost in every case relatives (brothers, uncles, cousins), members of the royal family (*baganwa*). In their turn these would establish subchiefs chosen among their relatives, or the aristocracy (*bafásoni*), or even Batutsi commoners, but seldom among the Bahutu. The division reached very far and the last elements of it were not only single hills, but even parts of a hill. And although the ensuing intrication and divided hierarchy remind us forcibly of our own feudo-vassalic middle ages, and appear consequently most unstable, the Barundi system, if we set aside some violent revolutions, possessed some sort of stability and could carry on thanks to its practically hereditary organization. Chiefs, subchiefs and all who had availed themselves of the deep-seated division of authority were naturally possessed of rights over the common people and were entitled to demand from them various privileges, usually defined by local custom, and which ranged from a present of beer to well-determined contributions or vaguer corvées (services).

423 661 Some scholars have maintained that the *mwami* definitely had a right of possession over the land of the whole of his sultanate. But the truth is that land was not an object of property for the *mwami* or for commoners and the *mwami* and his representatives simply had to allow its utilization and choose the people to carry it out. Such designations were, just as the political leaderships, more or less unstable, more or less precarious; there exists a heredity in fact; but it is possible for a chief, should he care to do so, to eject the tenants. Besides, the abandoned or untilled lands are at his disposal. The system in general enables members of the leading classes as well as members of the subject classes to constitute estates with the only difference that the former will possess large herds of cattle and have their lands tilled by people liable to unpaid service while the latter have only very few cows and must depend on their own labour and that of their families.

The political leader's say in agricultural matters also solves the difficult problem of proportioning field and pasture-lands. The chief will not allow the latter to be reduced, and the threat to the cattle-breeder is further avoided by the chief's right to use the sorghum fields for pastures after the harvest (*ibishaka-shaka*) either for themselves or for others.

423 The territory of an important chief, with its intermixing complex of herds, estates, revenues, and services, very often extended over large, sometimes

[p.14 (B)]

423 dispersed areas. The chief would have his *ingo* (plural of *rugo*, residence) built on several hills, and usually establish one of his wives in each of them, to direct the centre entrusted to her. This is a very typical estate organization : it is based on polygamy.

The position towards cattle-owners

422 We have said that the *mwami* did not possess the
661 land : neither has he any right of possession over the big cattle. The *mwami* would sometimes take cattle where he found them, but this was only a violent misuse of his tyrannical power. Batutsi and even Bahutu cattle-rearers are definitely the owners of their herds when, of course, the cattle are not simply entrusted to them.

231 These cattle can be given and this very thing adds
43 a great deal to their worth, for those who desire them
357 are naturally attracted towards those who own them. The king presents with cows the great who come to pay him homage. During the great annual sorghum festival, he ritually distributes cattle to some methodically chosen persons. The great men used to be surrounded, and are still, with a group of servants of various ranks : *ntore* (vassals who owed them a more important military aid than the average tenants), *bagendanyi* (young attendants charged to carry out their messages), *bakamyi* (young Batutsi entrusted with the milking of the cows), *abungere* (who watch over the cattle), *bakevvi* (cooks), *inshoreke* (female attendants and servants). The most esteemed among these followers (*ntore*, *bagendanyi*, *bakamyi*) hope to receive cows one day, the *bakamyi* especially, on the day when they will leave the service to get married.

231 There are also the so-called cattle-contracts. Here
675 are the most interesting of them : (1) A cattle-owner
425 gives someone a cow, in exchange, the donee will later
554 return a calf after the cow has calved two or three times. (2) An important owner gives several cows to a man who must in his turn permanently provide him with a milch-cow. (3) The owner of an important herd entrusts a man with the breeding of several cows which he may use for milk and manure ; one of the cows will be his if the herd has prospered.

In all these cases, the recipient becomes the liege of the donor (or the depositor). In some cases, the recipient is considered a near relative, even a son of the donor and marriage impediments ensue from the assimilation. On the other hand, the higher the donor is socially speaking, the less he tries to derive material profit from these transactions : his real profit is in the power he acquires over the person of the recipient.

423 *The relations between agriculturists*

425 Similar ties may exist between agriculturists. The

423 typical case is that of a man who has been allowed to
425 establish himself on a specified spot on a hill, that is, on the hill-side, between the stony higher belt and the swampy valley bottom; this gives him rights over the whole ground above and below him, up to the pasture-lands and down to the papyrus; now there may remain an uncultivated part in this vertical tract of land: if another agriculturist wishes to establish himself there, he will have to ask for the former occupant's permission, which as a rule can be received in exchange for a present. If the present is important, this will be equivalent to a kind of sale; if it is not, the new-comer will become the man, the *muhutu*, of the first-comer; he will have to obey him and carry out what commissions the other cares to entrust him with. The same relationship may arise if the occupant of an *itongo* (singular of *amatongo*) surrenders to a new comer lands that were already cultivated.

Relationship between craftsmen and other elements of the population

463 Industrial production is almost totally domestic, to the making of back-cloths (*impuzu*); there are however a few skilled handicraftsmen: potters, blacksmiths, makers of millstones, milkpots, bracelets, shell-jewels. Before markets were introduced, goods
435 used to be exchanged for food-stuffs or scrap-iron. This bartering was and still is practiced in the *ingo* as before.

431 But, besides this universal barter-system, there is what I have thought fit to call 'baronial exchange': 435 it is practised among members of the aristocracy only; it consists in offering members of the ruling 565 class some specified goods, in exchange for a cow; but this cow is admittedly worth more than the presented goods. Consequently, the giver of the goods will feel bound to go on making presents, until the recipient of them judges he is indebted in his turn and it is appropriate to bestow another cow. Of course, the recipient of the cows becomes the *muhutu* of the donor. I have gathered several instances of this relationship based on inequality: it occurs among salt-makers, blacksmiths, copper bracelets, pedlars (*abayangayanga*).

Women's activities

462 The wives of the great live in almost complete
461 inactivity; their *inshoreke* (attendants) do the domestic work for them ('they sweep the floor') or more delicate work (as fine basket-work). Only women till the land and make pots in Batwa households. Bahutu women till the land, sometimes, but not always, with the help of their husbands; the husband may have another job when he lives among a chief's attendants, has a trade of his own or peddles goods across the country.

[p. 15(8)]

462 Consequently the men folk, even when they do not
461 cultivate their fields themselves, are reasonably certain, except in the case of famine, to find sufficient food to sustain their lives and this gives their activity a peculiar character. Their activities may be directed towards improving their situation, but their existence does not depend on them : if necessary, they will wait a long time and without impatience for expected grants from the great.

444 You see Barundi who buy goods on one market and sell them on another where those goods are dearer. You see also Barundi who sell agricultural wares on one market, and with the money buy a greater amount of the same wares on a market where it is cheaper. Result, a greater amount of wares and of money. It is a curious adaptation of the species of speculation to an old non-monetary economic system.

The evolution in progress

178 Most chiefs have been converted and have accord-
177 ingly adopted monogamy : the estate organization based on polygamy must consequently be modified. Belgian administration has deliberately simplified native political methods and considerably reduced its personnel. The numberless services demanded by local leaders have been abolished : some corvées are still enforced, the abolition of others has been made good by allowing to the chiefs a percentage of the taxes paid by their subjects. Considerably fewer followers are attached to the chiefs : already the *ntore*[1] have disappeared and the extension of the clerk (*karani*)-system is making the *kagendanyi*[2] obsolete. Markets are more and more numerous and
[436] money has a circulation wider every day because this circulation is necessary if taxes are to be paid. Purely commercial exchanges will eliminate barional ex-

[p. 16 (A)]

1 [a type of vassal — Analyst]

2 [messenger attendant — Analyst]

178 changes completely. Speculation is gaining ground.
177 Certain cultures are spreading rapidly (cassava, which
[241] grows all the year round and so excludes the threat of famine ; coffee which yields a profit in cash, and helps to pay the tax-collector).

178 Finally, some house-groups have appeared of a type,
177 closer perhaps to town than to village, in the neigh-
361 bourhood of *bomas* (colonial administration centres)
563 or markets. Their inhabitants it is true are mostly foreigners : Belgian officials, European traders (Greeks), Hindus and Arabs, *baswahili* (Islamized negroes). It remains however that they are an entirely new feature in a country with such a widely dispersed population.

Conclusions

361 I thought I could draw your attention to some
571 details of the curious Urundi organization : a dense population, widely dispersed over the cultivable and habitable land according to the geographic possibilities, without any orientation centres (the few habitations of the chiefs cannot be said to produce anything like demographic concentration) ; the small part played by neighbourhood relations, the predominance of intricate, but personal ties, creating man-to-man dependance, or in other words the primacy of the vertical over the horizontal relationships.

Such an organization was possible in a country almost completely closed to foreign influence, without either markets or money, with a hierarchical structure and must be related to conditions both ethnographical and geographical. This organization is
[177 giving way under the influence of European ad-
178] ministration, of the development of trade, and of a new economy based more and more upon monetary transactions.

[p. 16 (B)]